

CHARRETTE INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE FOR FACILITATORS

Charrettes are multi-day, intensive, highly, visual design and planning workshops. Charrettes are designed to stimulate ideas, involve a wide range of interests in the planning and design process, and emphasizes a free flow of information and opinions. The primary role of a charrette workshop is to provide a forum for building agreements. One great advantage of a charrette is its multi-day format, which allows a group to "stay with it" until some conclusion is reached.

The Main Street charrette consists of invited participants who are acknowledged experts or stakeholders in the design and maintenance of main streets and highways. This can present a challenge to facilitators, since many of the participants will have extensive personal and professional experience and will have formed strong opinions. The facilitator's most important role will be to make sure that **all ideas are heard**, a creative and open exchange of ideas is maintained, and that an agreement is finally reached on each identified issue.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FACILITATOR

1. **Set the Tone.** Maintain an open, positive, and welcoming attitude.
2. **Acknowledge All Ideas.** Make sure each participant has ample opportunity to share ideas. Each person must feel heard and acknowledged.
3. **Provide Guidance.** If several people want to speak at once, establish a quick list. If someone is anxious to talk, but not getting a chance, be aware of body language and maintain eye contact. Let them know that you'll make sure that they get their chance to speak.
4. **Clarify.** In the excitement of the moment, important concepts can get garbled. Help clarify the ideas, but do so without adding values, assumptions, etc. Constantly check with the group to make sure that you, the recorder, and all the table participants understand the point before moving on.
5. **Track and Guide.** Keep the discussion on track. It is the facilitator's job to break up circular discussions and get the discussion on to the next point.
6. **Record Accurately and Completely.** The facilitator ensures that all opinions and ideas are recorded. Each table will have a recorder – make sure that this person is catching all the ideas. Remember to record the minority as well as the dominant opinion.
7. **Conclude.** It is important to bring each topic to a distinct conclusion before adding a new set of issues to the dialog. It is also important to clarify the action steps and key people responsible for implementation. There are two conclusion points shown on the charrette agenda when each table must report to the group.

DEALING WITH CONFLICT

As experienced facilitators, you are all aware that disagreement and conflict are a necessary and creative part of the Main Street charrette. Through creating an atmosphere of trust and openness, disagreements can be aired and resolved, or at the least recorded. Left unacknowledged, disagreements discourage participation and can undermine any conclusion or agreement building that has been accomplished.

It is important to be aware of the ways that you, as well as the group members, typically deal with conflict. Most people will do one of the following:

- ☐ *Avoidance:* when one or more parties withdraws from the conflict. On the surface, this may make the process run smoother; however, it subverts the purpose of the charrette.
- ☐ *Smoothing Over:* when the greatest emphasis is placed on preserving "the peace" by giving in to a dominant opinion, the agreement-building aspects of the charrette are subverted. The one who tries to smooth things over by giving in, often leave the process feeling taken advantage of.
- ☐ *Forcing:* occurs when one authoritative position is adopted at the expense of another, often without discussion. While it may lead to a form of closure, it is rarely productive.

The facilitator must avoid these behaviors, and must try to guide the group through them as well. More productive behaviors are the goal of the charrette. These are:

- ☐ *Compromise:* This is the art of bargaining. It is often the best approach, but it is important to resort to compromise only after all alternatives have been explored.
- ☐ *Agreement building* is the ultimate goal of the Main Street charrette. Coming to agreement involves developing solutions that everyone consents to live with. The needs of all positions are identified and confronted through open discussion. Agreement building is a long process and will often result in one or the other conflict responses. Agreement does not necessarily mean total consensus – rather, it means that the workshop ends with a handshake and a shared understanding of how to move forward.

REMEMBER THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUCCESSFUL FACILITATOR

- ☐ Positive, energetic, assertive, and respectful;
- ☐ Stimulates and manages without manipulating;
- ☐ Maintains the enthusiasm of the group;
- ☐ Ensures that everyone participates;
- ☐ Focuses on the success of the group;
- ☐ Remains calm and open to criticism;
- ☐ Stays organized; and
- ☐ Has fun!